DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 198 216 UD 021 197

AUTHOR Paddock, Susan C.: Sferra, Bobbie A.
TITLE Citizen Participation in Decision Making.
INSTITUTION Arizona State Univ., Tempe. Southwest Regional Center for Community Education Development.
SPONS AGENCY Arizona State Univ., Tempe.: Mott (C.S.) Foundation, Flint, Mich.: Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 80
GRANT G007902778
NOTE 61p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Board of Education Policy: Community Influence: *Community Involvement: Community Role: *Decision Making: *Educational Policy: Elementary Secondary Education: *Policy Formation

ABSTRACT

This handbook for parents defines and describes the process of citizen participation in educational decision making. After describing the history of citizen involvement, the booklet answers questions regarding why and how community members can become involved in policy formation. Problems in participatory decision making and strategies for increasing its effectiveness are also discussed. (MK)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 021 197

ED198216

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING

BY
SUSAN C. PADDOCK
AND
BOBBIE A. SFERRA

ILLUSTRATED BY
LOWELL BROWN

A PROJECT JOINTLY SPONSORED BY
THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY
THE C.S. MOTT FOUNDATION

1980

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

GRANT NO. G007902778

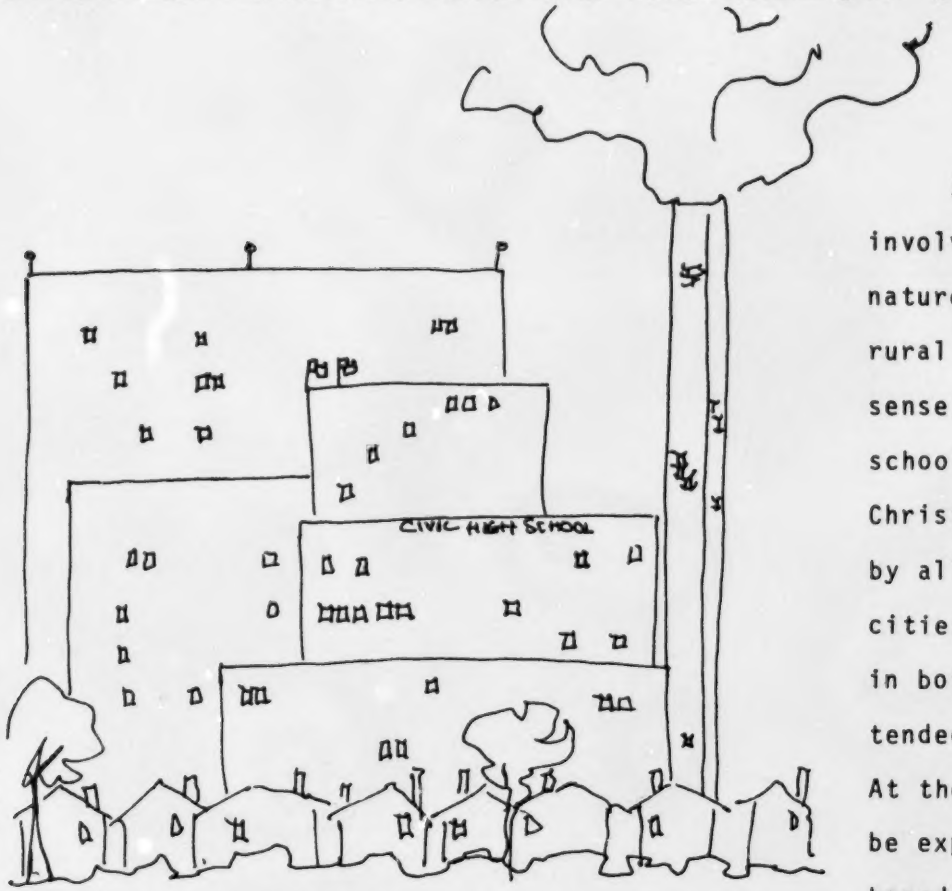
FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:
SW CENTER FOR COMM. ED. DEVLPT.
108 FARMER BUILDING
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY
TEMPE, AZ 85281

4

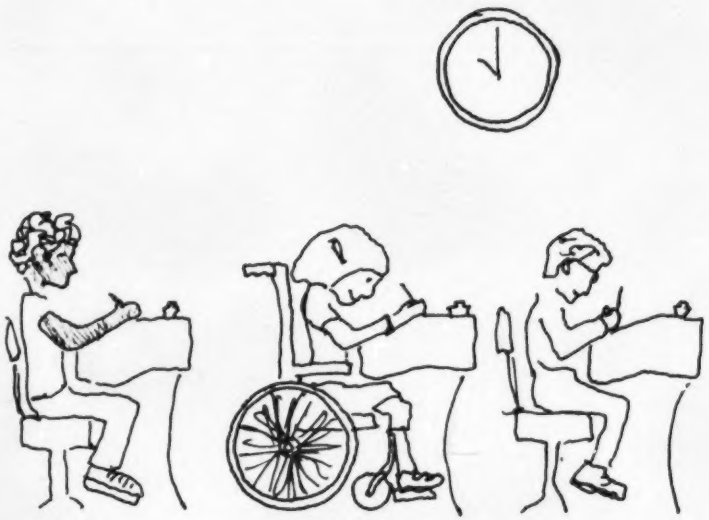
Perhaps the most cherished belief of the American system of government is the right of the people to govern themselves. While this belief generally finds expression in government by elected representatives, people still believe that they should have a direct say in government. People also believe in local control, on the premise that the more local the government, the greater the access of citizens to decision making and thus the greater the responsiveness of the government to the will of the people.

5

These beliefs in local government and the right of the people to govern themselves seem to be epitomized by the local school district. It is at this level that concerned citizens expect to have a first-hand familiarity with problems and issues and to participate in decision making. Despite their expectations, however, citizens often pay more attention to national rather than local issues.



In part, the failure of citizens to be involved in decision making is due to the changing nature of the school. When we were a nation of rural and small-town dwellers there was a strong sense of community that centered around the school. School affairs, such as the annual Christmas pageant, were civic happenings, attended by all community residents. As our towns grew to cities and the children to be educated increased in both number and diversity, school districts tended to become larger and more bureaucratized. At the same time, citizen participation began to be expressed mainly in the election of school board representatives and in service to school support groups. Elected boards became bodies for ratifying decisions made by educational professionals rather than decision-making councils.



Schools not only began to serve more people, but they also began to serve more diverse populations. Pressure groups representing these populations sought the support of federal government to provide equal educational opportunity for all people. From this pressure came legislation for a variety of programs including Headstart, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. This legislation provided money for increasing the equality of educational opportunity for many children who previously had been overlooked in the nation's schools.

Some of this federal legislation required citizen participation in school decision making. Evidence of such participation was necessary before federal money was granted. This federal incentive for participation by special interest groups stimulated participation by others.

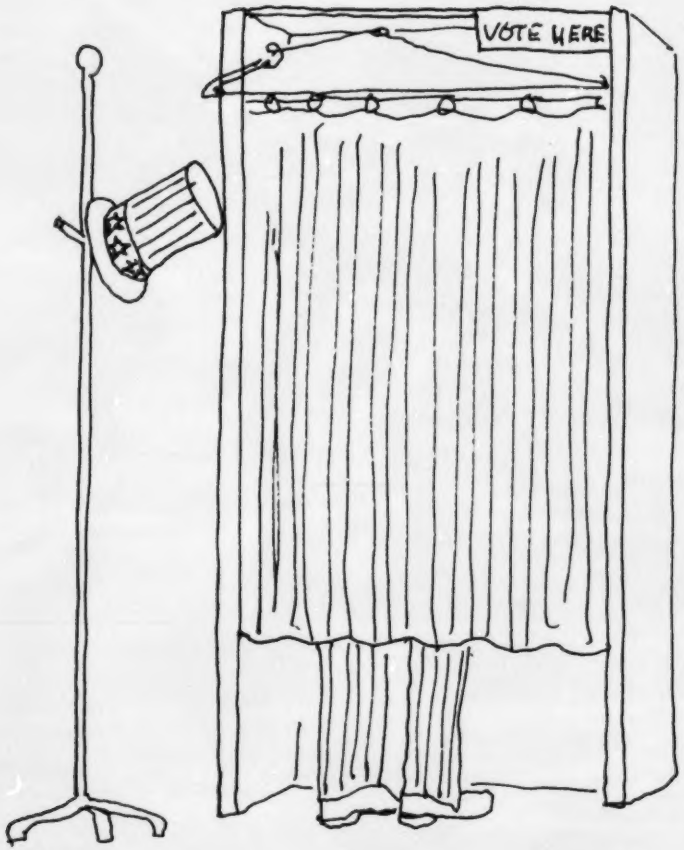
This trend toward increased citizen participation raises important questions about the purpose and nature of such participation. Citizen participation is not without its problems: some participants become disillusioned when their efforts seem to vall short of their expectations; others raise questions about the right of one group to impose its will on others; and educators may despair that their ability to provide the best possible educational programs is impaired when citizens get involved in decision making. This module tries to respond to some of these concerns and problems.

14

WHY DO WE NEED CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING?

Needs and desires of the community must be known in order for them to be reflected in decisions. However, communication of these needs and desires may not happen if elected officials do not represent all segments of the community. Citizen participation in decision making can increase the likelihood that decisions will reflect real community attitudes. This is because citizen participation increases the input of different groups in the community.

15



WHY DO CITIZENS BECOME INVOLVED IN DECISION MAKING?

People participate in decision making because they believe that:

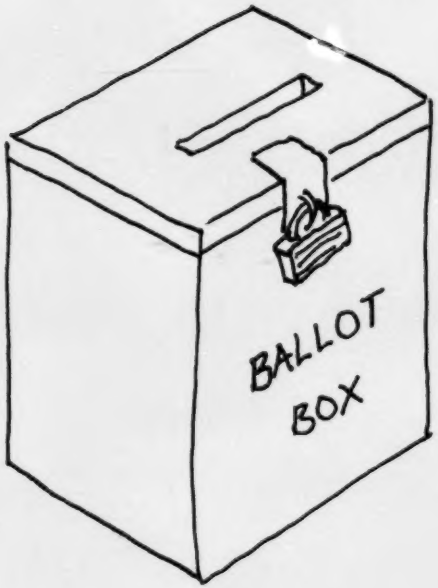
1. their input will make a difference;
2. they are directly affected by the problem and the decision to be made;
3. people in elected or appointed positions want and need their input.

HOW DO CITIZENS PARTICIPATE?

Citizen participation has been classified according to whether it is formal or informal and whether it is individually- or organizationally-based. (Sumption, 1966 - See Table I)

	FORMAL	INFORMAL
ORGANIZATIONAL	GROUPS THAT ARE MANDATED AND FOR WHICH A STRUCTURE IS ESSENTIAL. EXAMPLE: CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE, PTA.	UNSTRUCTURED GROUPS DEVELOPED ON AN AD HOC BASIS TO DEAL WITH SPECIFIC ISSUES EXAMPLE: PRESSURE GROUPS
INDIVIDUAL	MANDATED BEHAVIOR FOR AN INDIVIDUAL EXAMPLE: VOTING	INDIVIDUAL INPUT EXAMPLE: TESTIMONY AT A BOARD MEETING

TABLE 1



Formal organizational participation refers to groups that are mandated and for which a structure is essential. Examples of this type of participation are the board of education, advisory committees and parent-teacher associations. Although the board of education is the formal organization responsible for the adoption and enactment of school policies, board members commonly seek additional input from community members and may appoint advisory committees of special interest groups to work on specific issues. Another formal organizational group is the parent-teacher association. The PTA is a voluntary group which solicits support from school personnel and parents. It serves as a decision-making body for local issues and as as advisory body for district policy. Formal individual participation involves mandated behavior for individuals, such as voting.

23

Informal organizational participation involves unstructured groups developed on an ad hoc basis to deal with specific issues. Sometimes these take the form of pressure groups which attempt to influence the decision-making process. Informal individual participation involves individual input. A single but somewhat vocal individual can have impact, especially where there is little participation.

24

Whether formal or informal, group or individual, participation in decision making is an important determinant of policies and actions. Citizens can make decisions about a number of things including:

1. identification of a problem
2. analysis of parts of the problem
3. construction of alternative solutions
4. gathering of information and opinions about alternatives
5. development of a plan of action
6. review of progress on the action
7. evaluation of the actions taken

HOW ARE DECISIONS MADE?

Decisions can be made using any of a number of decision-making processes. The most common are:

1. Leader-determined-decisions made by a single person or by a minority; the leader then seeks the support of the group for the entire group.

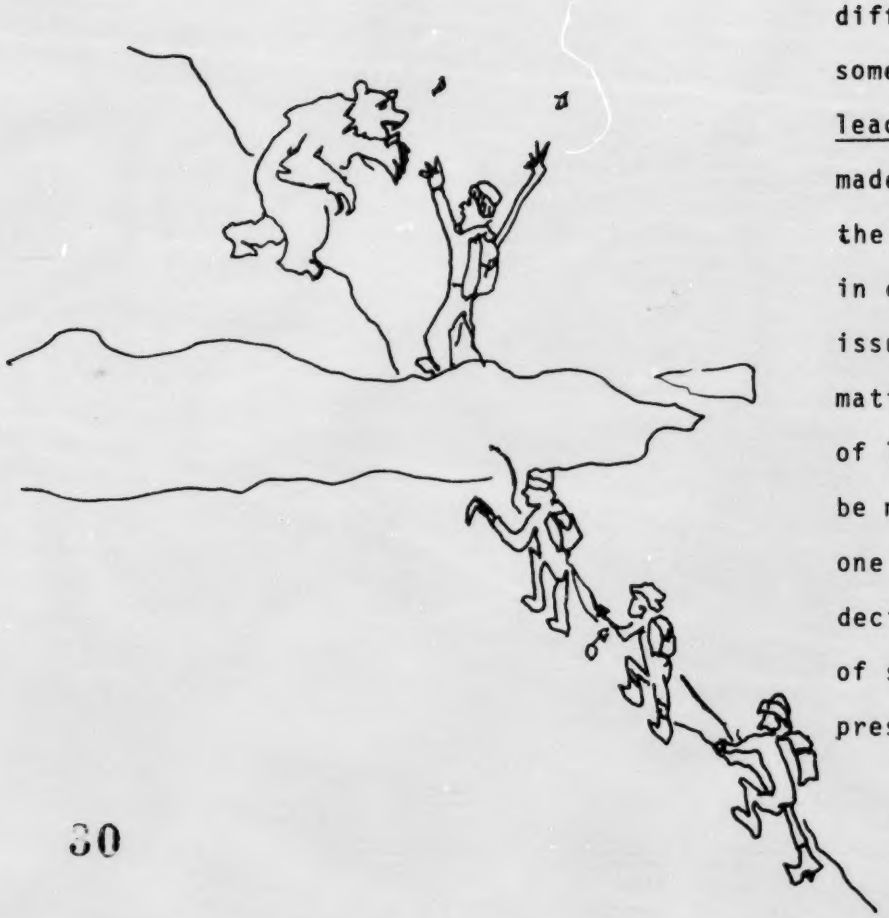
2. Majority-decisions based on the ability of a majority to make a choice for the entire group.

3. Consensus-decisions based on support of the total group after discussion and debate; all members agree they can "live with" the decision.

(See Table II)

TYPE	SITUATIONS FOR USE	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
LEADER-DETERMINED			
DECISION MADE BY A SINGLE PERSON OR BY A MINORITY; THE LEADER SEEKS THE SUPPORT OF THE GROUP FOR THE DECISION.	EMERGENCY SITUATIONS; WHEN PERSONAL ISSUES ARE INVOLVED; WHEN DECISION IS OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE; WHEN THE DECISION RELIES ON EXPERTISE THAT IS NOT AVAILABLE TO OTHER GROUP MEMBERS.	QUICK DECISION IS MADE.	AN UNACCEPTABLE DECISION CAN BE MADE DUE TO FACTORS SUCH AS LACK OF INFORMATION AND PERSONAL BIAS.
MAJORITY			
DECISIONS BASED ON THE ABILITY OF A MAJORITY TO MAKE A CHOICE FOR THE ENTIRE GROUP.	WHEN COMPLEX ISSUES ARE INVOLVED; WHEN GROUP CANNOT REACH CONSENSUS	INPUT FROM MANY PEOPLE.	DECISION MAY NOT REFLECT FEELINGS OF ENTIRE GROUP; MINORITY MAY NOT FEEL SATISFIED WITH DECISION OR HAVE OWNERSHIP IN ACTIONS.
CONSENSUS			
DECISIONS BASED ON SUPPORT OF THE TOTAL GROUP AFTER DISCUSSION AND DEBATE; ALL MEMBERS AGREE THEY CAN "LIVE WITH" THE DECISION.	WHEN SUPPORT OF GROUP MEMBERS IS NECESSARY FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISIONS.	INPUT FROM MANY PEOPLE AS WELL AS INFORMATION REGARDING FEELING AND COMMITMENT.	TIME-CONSUMING, REQUIRES A RELATIVELY SMALL GROUP.

TABLE II

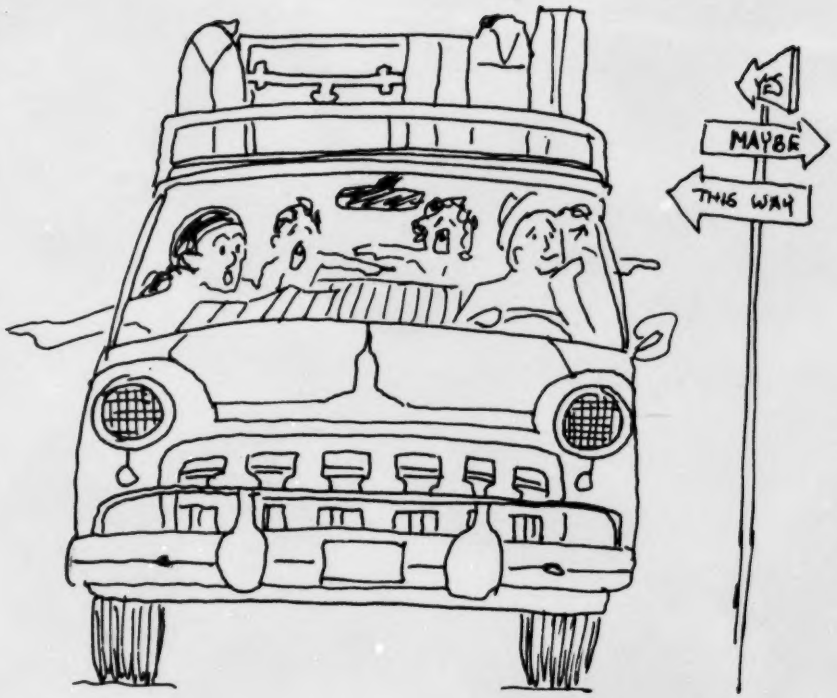


30

Different situations require the use of different decision-making processes. For instance, some issues may be more easily resolved at the leader-determined level, where the decision is made by an individual who seeks the support of the group for the decision. This may be effective in certain emergency situations, when personal issues are involved, or when the decision is a matter of little importance. The advantage of leader-determined action is that decisions can be made in a short period of time. However, one person may be unable to make an acceptable decision regarding certain issues due to lack of sufficient information, personal bias, time pressures or other factors.

31

On the other hand, when complex issues are involved or when a group cannot reach consensus the majority decision-making process is more appropriate. This method is simply "the majority wins" approach. Decision making by a majority allows input from many people in discussion. However, there is the possibility that the decision may not reflect the feelings of the entire group, and that the majority may not feel satisfied with the decision or feel ownership for any actions.



Another decision-making process for use in situations when support by group members is necessary is group consensus. A consensus or collaborative decision is on in which all members agree they can "live with" a decision. Consensus decision making encourages individuals to contribute information and share feelings for better understanding of the issues. It aims at increasing the amount of knowledge, understanding, commitment, and involvement of group members in the belief that when people have a chance to express feelings they are more willing to support a decision. Unfortunately, consensus decision making is time-consuming and is most effective when the group is relatively small.

While there is no single process which will ensure good decisions, it is important that any process used include an accurate and complete communication system. That system should allow both decision makers and decision implementors to share information and feelings so that the result of the group's deliberations leads to effective action.

PROBLEMS IN PARTICIPATORY DECISION MAKING

As we have seen, it is important that those affected by decisions have input into the decision-making process. However, participatory decision making is not without problems. Problems come both from the community and from professionals themselves.

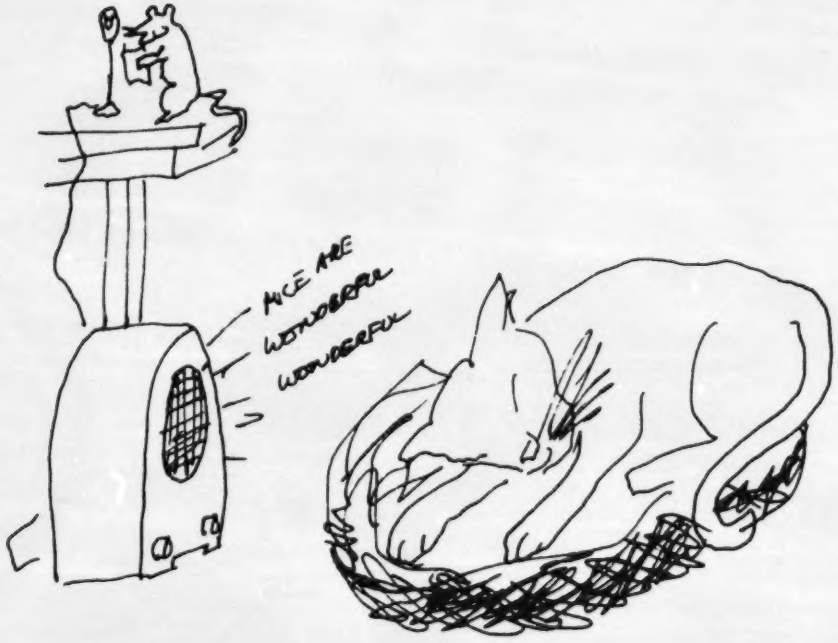
One problem is that citizen groups may be loosely or poorly organized: no one may be willing to take a leadership role; a group may not agree on what the problem is; or the task may require too much time and energy of group members.

40

The personal characteristics of group members affect decision making and may cause problems for that process. Participants may have unrealistic expectations of their part or the group's part in the final decisions. They may lack the necessary communication skills to be effective group members. A group leader may fail to have sufficient leadership skills or experience. A few talkative or aggressive individuals may control meetings, especially if the group has more than 15 members. The group may be swayed by members who have priviliged access to information which supports their own point of view. Finally, the group may be affected by personal concerns of members, whether or not those concerns address the subject of the group's action; a member with an "axe to grind", for

example, may interfere with the normal order of the decision-making process. These and other factors related to personal characteristics of group members can harm participatory decision-making.

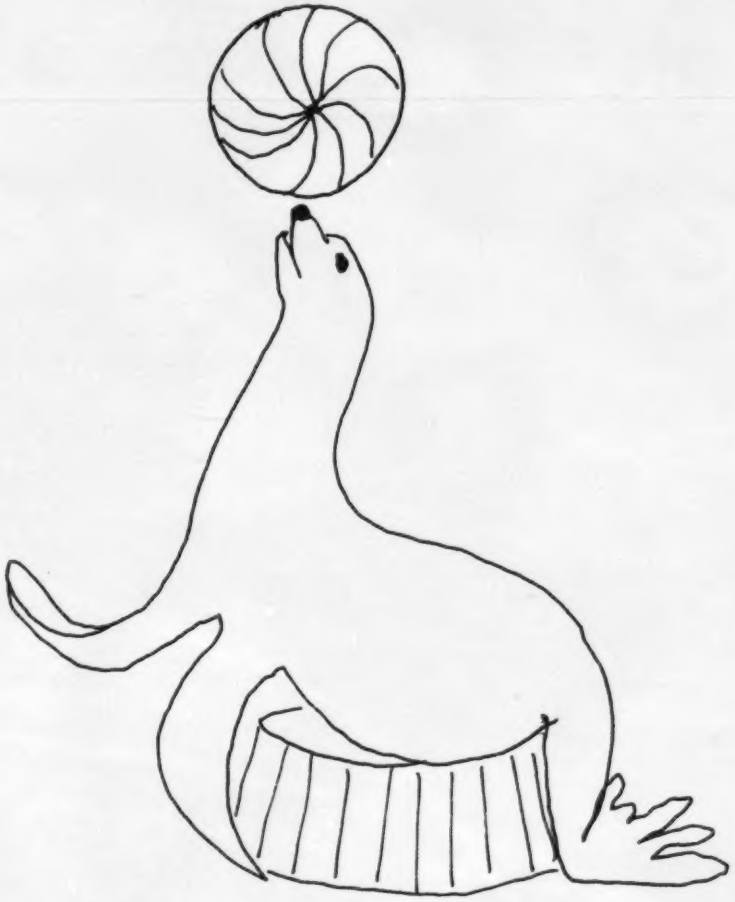
Being poorly informed or misinformed also may be a serious problem in citizen participation. Accurate information may not be available to citizens or may be available only to a select few In other cases, administrators may not believe that the community should have certain information about the organization. Decisions made on the basis of this limited information may be poor or ineffective and, further, they are often ignored by administrators. In "repressed democracy", where information is withheld, policies will not reflect accurately either citizens' needs or organizational realities.



The power structure also can interfere with decision making. For example, administrators may accept citizen input only when it does not change the balance of power in the system. Meaningful involvement by the community in decision making may be seen as threatening to professionals in this case, or when administration is authoritarian, citizen participation may result in a "rubber stamp" council.

When administrators do not want to relinquish control but want to give the impression that participation is desired they may use any one of several strategies:

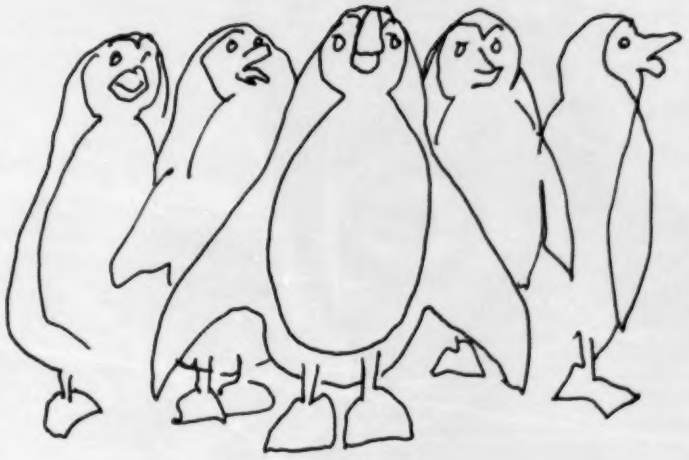
1. Directive Approach-In this strategy, the administrator actually makes the decisions by:
   (a) hand picking group members;
   (b) identifying the problem for the group;
   (c) identifying possible solutions;
   (d) selecting which solution is best;
   (e) suggesting a course of action for that solution; and
   (f) providing information which demonstrates that the problem has been solved.



A skilled administrator can do all this without having group members feel that they have been controlled or directed.

2. Manipulation-With manipulation the administrator does not directly control all action but is present at all meetings and does much of the speaking and groundwork for the group. The administrator views the group as a token one and thus feels justified in his/her assertive behavior.

3. Program Visibility-The administrator plans a number of programs which meet superficial needs and satisfy potential pressure groups. However, the real purpose of all this activity is to keep people busy; the administrator serves as a barrier to any real involvement by keeping potential decision makers occupied and making them feel "important."



INCREASING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

How can we increase the effectiveness of citizen participation in decision making? To have citizens as real partners in the policymaking process we must build on strengths and overcome problems or weaknesses. Some of the things which are important for this are:

1. Well-defined roles. What are the functions and limitations of the citizen group? If these are clear and agreed-upon the group can avoid debating what it should do and can move directly to the task-at-hand.

2. Group size and composition. The group must be large enough to allow for good discussion (usually at least five people) and not so large that everyone can take part in the meeting (usually not more than fifteen people). The group should represent a diversity of citizen interests but members should be able to feel comfortable making compromises among competing interests.

3. Group structure and procedures. The group should have a defined structure and follow accepted decision making procedures. An agenda should be

developed for each meeting and used to direct group discussion. The environment of group meetings should provide sufficient light, ventilation and opportunity for participant interaction.

4. Group leadership. The choice of a group leader is perhaps the most critical decision in affecting citizen participation. Skills, and experiences and attitudes all must be considered in this choice. A good leader ensures that the decision-making process will proceed smoothly.

5. Delegation of power. The administrator and the group leader must be able to delegate power and authority to other group members.

6. Credit for actions. The citizen group must be able to see the result of their actions and be given public credit for their work.

7. Open two-way communication. The citizen group must be allowed to ask questions and receive answers. The administrator must be able to accept critical evaluation.

8. Continuous evaluation. The citizen group should engage in an ongoing self-evaluation process to assess its progress.

52

Summary

Citizen participation can help both the individual and the organization. Two noted authors have said it best:

> To give people help, while denying them a significant part in the action, contributes nothing to the development of the individual. In the deepest sense it is not giving but taking--taking their dignity. Denial of the opportunity for participation is the denial of human dignity and democracy. It will not work.
>
> Alinsky, Rules for Radicals, New York: Random House, 1971, p. 123.

53

Citizen participation does not mean the illusion of participation, the semblance of involvement, the opportunity to speak without being heard, the receipt of token benefits, or the enjoyment of stop-gap palliative measures. Participation means participation in every dimension of life, of culture, of our economy, our educational system, our political system, our decision-making processes. It means full enfranchisement with respect to the totality of society's activities.

Hans B.C. Speigel (editor), Citizen Participation in Urban Development, Washington, D.C.: NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science, 1968, p. 223.

56

This module has been only an introduction to the area of citizen participation. A subject as complex as citizen participation requires time and experience in order for everyone to understand and feel comfortable with it, and so a bibliography of resources has been provided for further reference.

57

A LIST OF CRITICAL QUESTIONS ON CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

1. What is the purpose(s) of the citizen participation effort and who determines such purposes?
2. Who is to be involved and what strategies or tactics are to be employed?
3. What are the limitations, if any, placed on such participation efforts?
4. What are the personal benefits to be derived by the participants themselves and the community in general?
5. What are the implied criteria of "successful participation" and who determines such criteria?
6. What resources are available to support such efforts?
7. How will the relative functions of both lay and professional be addressed?
8. If participation is to be linked to an agency or organization, where is it to be located in the organizational structure?
9. To what extent will the participants have access to decision-making?
10. What local conditions or factors need to be considered relative to the participation efforts?

Source: Warden, J.W., Citizen Participation. MidAtlantic Center for Community Education, 1977 (p.23)

59

BIBLIOGRAPHY - CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Azarnoff, R. "New Model for Working with School-Community Councils," NASSP Bulletin, January, 1974, pp. 58-62.

Beckhard, R. Organization Development: Strategies and Models. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969.

Bragg, J.E. and I.R. Andrews. "Participative Decision-Making: An Experimental Study in a Hospital." Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, November, 1973, pp. 727-735.

Burback, H.J. and J.P. Esposito. "An Organizational Plan - School and Community." Clearinghouse, January, 1974, pp. 281-287.

Davies, D. Communities and Their Schools. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980.

Davis, D. and R. Zerchykov. Citizen Participation in Education. Annotated Bibliography. (Second Edition) Boston, MA: Institute for Responsive Education, January, 1978.

Glass, T. "Community Involvement and Shared Decision Making." NASSP Bulletin. October, 1977, pp. 5-9.

Mann, D. "Public Understanding of Education and Decision Making." Education Administration Quarterly. Spring, 1974, pp. 1-8.

Schmuck, R.A. and P.A. Schmuck. Group Process in the Classroom. Dubuque: W.C. Brown, 1971.

Schmuck, R.A. "Developing Collaborative Decision Making. The Importance of Trusting, Strong and Skillful Leaders, Group Consensus." Education Technology. October, 1972, pp. 43-47.

Schmuck, R.A. et al. The Second Handbook of Organization Development in Schools. Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield Pub. Co., 1977.

Sumption, M.R. and Y. Engstrom. School-Community Relations. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1966.

Taylor, C.W. "Panel Consensus Technique: A New Approach to Decision Making." Journal of Creative Behavior. 1972, pp. 187-198.

Walter, J.E. and J.D. McCall, "Citizens Committees Can Make a Difference." School and Community. May, 1976, p. 10-11, 33.